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ABSTRACT

Nineteen 4-year-old preschool children participated in a study designed to determine the effects of teaching communication skills in a day care center setting. The field experiment was conducted using a time series design. An observation guide consisting of a hierarchical arrangement of ineffective responses was used to obtain the frequency of ineffective responses before and after formal teaching sessions on communication skills. Analysis of variance and co-variance with repeated measures were used for data analysis. Results showed a significant difference between the total number of acting out behaviors observed before and after implementation of the teaching program, and between pre- and post-observations for each day of the week. Findings suggest that formal instruction in communication skills may be one viable approach to decreasing acting out behavior among children in day care centers. (Author/DR)

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"EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING COMMUNICATION SKILLS ON ACTING OUT BEHAVIORS Among FOUR YEAR OLDS IN A DAY CARE CENTER."

By

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Running Head: Effectiveness of Teaching Communication Skills on Acting out Behaviors Among Four Year Olds In a Day Care Center

ABSTRACT

Effectiveness Of Teaching Communication Skills On Acting Out Behaviors Among Four Year Olds, In A Day Care Center, Glanville, Cathryn and Sundberg, Judith, 1986: Descriptors. communication/young children/acting out behavior/day care.

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of teaching communication skills to pre school children in a day care center. A field experiment was conducted using a time series design. The sample consisted of the total population of four year olds (N=19) attending the center. An observation guide consisting of a hierarchical arrangement of ineffective responses was used to obtain the frequency of ineffective responses before and after formal teaching sessions on communication skills. Analysis of variance and co-variance with repeated measures were used for data analysis. There was a significant difference between the total number of acting out behaviors observed before and after implementation of the teaching program. $F(1,25)$ 22.62 $p < .0001$. Also there was a significant difference between pre and post observations for each day of the week. $F(4,100)$ 9=6.8= $p < .0001$. Findings suggest that formal instruction in communication skills may be one viable approach to decreasing acting out behavior among children in day care centers.

Communication has been defined as a process by which information is exchanged (Webster, 1981). Joos, Nelson and Lyness (1985) define communication as the process and structure of sending and receiving messages by a variety of means. Ruesch (1968), Spitz (1957), and Watzlawick (1967) suggested that communication is "Any perceivable behavior which helps one or more persons influence the perceptions, feelings, emotions, thoughts or actions of others, whether it is intentional or non intentional." Each of these definitions suggest that communication is a complex process and according to Collins (1983) and Stewart & Sundeen (1983) it is this process which links the individual, his internal and external environment.

Success and feelings of mastery within the environment promote interpersonal growth as positive behavioral changes occur. As the frequency of successful interactions with others increase, effective communication skills continue to develop. Lack of mastery within the environment decreases the frequency of successful interactions with others and often triggers acting out behaviors.

Children who demonstrate acting out behaviors that become disruptive may not be socially accepted by their peers and may be perceived to have low social status within their peer group (Pandely, 1971); (Smith & Olsen, 1970). Non conformity and aggressive behaviors increase and the child becomes isolated, or rejected by peers. The implications are that prevention is important and adults must assume responsibility for providing young children with learning experiences that yield successful interactions with peers and others within their environment.

The purpose of this research was to determine the effects of teaching communication skills to pre school children in a day care setting.

Research Question

Does teaching communication skills to four year olds decrease acting out behaviors in a day care center?

Operational Definitions

Communication Skills Ability to identify feelings and to verbalize specific behaviors that evoke these feelings.

Acting Out Behaviors Ineffective behavioral responses which disrupt planned and free choice activities in the day care center.

Hypothesis

Four year olds who receive formal instruction in Communication skills will not demonstrate a decrease in the number and type of ineffective responses as they interact with their peers in a day care center.

Limitations

Although cognitive knowledge does influence feelings and expression of feelings, the theoretial realm of Symbolic Communication and Spontaneous Communication as described by Buck (1984) was not included in establishing a framework for this study. Neither were theories related to prelinguistic and early linguistic development of communication skills (Klinzing and Klinzing (1985).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study included the following concepts:

1. communication, 2) teaching-learning, 3) behavioral responses.

Conceptual Definitions for Major Concepts

Webster (1981) defines communication as a process by which information is exchanged. Joos, Nelson and Lyness (1985) define communication as the process and structure of sending and receiving messages by a variety of means. For the purpose of this study, communication was defined as "Any perceivable behaviors which help one of more persons influence the perceptions, feelings, emotions, thoughts or actions of others, whether it is intentional of non intentional." (Spitz, 1957).

Behavioral at Responses: Overt and covert actions of an organism (Schaeffer and Martin, 1969). These actions are affected by communication and in turn affect communication (Watzlawick, 1967).

Teaching-Learning: Teaching is structuring, arranging and implementing learning experiences. Learning is defined as a systematic change in behavior as a consequence of experience in a specified situation (Estes, 1979).

Review of the Literature

Effective communication skills positively influence interpersonal relationships. If individuals are to negotiate the world, they have to be able to secure information from others. The information needed includes knowledge of self in relation to the world (Collins, 1983). Ones ability to communicate effectively provides the basis for establishing relationships which give the needed information. This then leads to successful interactions with others which positively influences coping abilities in social situations.

Young children who identify and verbalize their feelings and thoughts that are congruent with body movements and actions when interacting with others are demonstrating effective communication skills. Hymovich and Chamberlan (1981) state that ability to express ones feelings constructively and respond to feeling tones along with the content of the message not only enhances communication but problem solving as well.

According to Piaget (1969) children under the age of seven are unable to engage in meaningful communication because they are egocentric and cannot take into consideration anothers point of view. He further states that children in this age group are unable to determine what information is needed by the listener. Ginsberg (1979) states that although young children assimilate the remarks of others into their schema, there is little relationship between what is assimilated and what the child might attempt to communicate.

Piaget (1969) points out that as the child approaches 7 years of age he decenters, thus enabling him to engage in meaningful communication. He is able to move beyond his own perspective views and become concerned about how the perspective views of others differ from his own. Piaget (1969), identifies this process as empathy. Yarrow & Scott (1973) examined the concept of empathy using a sample consisting of pre school children. Their findings revealed that abilities for demonstrating empathetic concern and sensitivity to inferred needs of others existed. Stewart and Sundeen (1979, 1983) state that Piaget's theory applies to the development of digital communication rather that analogical communication which is learned through interpersonal problem solving.

There are three cognitive componets of interpersonal problem solving. According to Platt and Spivack (1976) these are: (1) means end thinking; (2) alternative thinking; (3) perspective taking. The exact extent to which each of these is interrelated needs further study. However Platt (1974) noted that there was a relationship between planning events to solve a problem and thinking about social situations from the perspectives of others involved in the situation.

Although Piaget's theory does not support teaching young children in the preoperational stage communication skills, Jerome Bruner (1960, 1966) expresses different views. Bruner states that any subject can be taught effectively in some form to any child at any age. In his views, Bruner developed sequences which he labeled (enactive) learning through action; (iconic) perceptual representation of an image which stands for something,

and (symbolic) mode which enables one to translate an experience into words. These sequences suggest that the transformation which Piaget says comes at a latter stage of development can actually occur.

Bruner (1960, 1966) reveals that children are capable of successive scanning, a strategy which encompasses trial and error. This process involves making a hypothesis, along with choices which are re-inforced.

It is within this content that one might conclude that if treatment programs (Kendall & Braswell 1984) can be successfully designed to assist children who have deficits in interpersonal problem solving; it seems logical then that structured programs for teaching communication skills with prevention as the primary focus, can be successful as well. However, the key to success is matching content and learning experiences with the child's capabilities.

Methodology:

This was a field experiment using a time-series design. The sample consisted of the total population of four year olds in an inner city day care center. There was one teacher and one classroom aide for this group of children.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. All subject were in attendance at the day care center at least one year prior to beginning the study.
2. All children were between forty eight months to fifty months of age.

Observation Guide for Data Collection

The investigator identified a list of behaviors considered to be ineffective responses of four year olds as they interact with their peers.

Five weeks prior to beginning the study the investigators held a meeting with all the teachers in the Day Care Center and asked them individually to write down a list of acting out behaviors consistently demonstrated by the children during structured and free choice activities.

Behaviors identified by the teachers were matched with those identified by the investigators. Any behavior omitted from the investigators original list was included on the final list shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1

Each behavior from the final list was placed on a 5 x 8 card. These cards were given to a panel of judges who were chosen on the basis of their expertise in working with young childerin in normal settings as well as Mental Health-Psychiatric settings. The judges were asked to place each card in one of five piles representing a range of most undesirable (5) to most desirable (1). This provided a hierarchical arrangement for each group of behaviors to be placed on the observation guide shown in Table 2. The behaviors were placed in a column on the left, and space was provided on the right for observers to record the frequencey of the behaviors demonstrated.

Insert Table 2

Teaching Program

The teaching program was adopted from the Minnesota Model for Communication (Miller, Nun, & Wachman 1975).

The model itself is divided into four styles of communication. The first is low risk, low information which is superficial in terms of relationship building but necessary for simple, friendly interactions with others. The second style includes those behaviors that persons use to try to change others or the situation. These behaviors usually result in the experience of a "put down" feeling by the receiver of the message. Also, in this style, mixed messages are identified. The third style of communication is an analytical, intellectual exploration of events, feeling and interactions that have occured in the past. This is a speculative, tentative style with low risk. The fourth and last style is one of relationship building. This style promotes the interaction between persons in the present time on a feeling level. Reflective skills and attentive listening are used. Interactions based on this style facilitates and allows for respect of differences between people thus promoting successful interactions with others. The fourth style provided the primary focus not only for the study but for teaching materials and methods as well.

Role playing, transparencies and other visual materials, such as cartoons and pictures developed by an artist, were used for presenting essential content from the model. In addition these strategies were used for the purpose of stimulating discussion among the children, the teacher, and classroom aide. Findings from research studies show that visual aides designed to explain, clarify and reinforce critical content, enhances learning. (Dwyer 1979).

Procedure

Prior to data collections, four observers were selected on the basis of their educational preparation and experience in working with young children in a variety of settings.

Due to the fact that specific observations were known to the observers, the purpose of the study and the hypothesis to be tested remained unkown to them throughout the study.

The observers were required to complete training sessions on observing behavior (Fassnacht 1982). Sessions consisted of viewing a teaching film on observing interviewing techniques. They were asked to observe and record the nonverbal behaviors demonstrated by the interviewer and the interviewee. This was repeated until there was ninety percent agreement among the four observers.

Upon completion of the training sessions the observers pretested both instruments in another setting using subjects who met the criteria established for the study population. This provided an additional opportunity for the investigators to check levels of agreement between observers using the actual tools for data collection. The rate of agreement among raters was ninety-five percent. Periodic checks were made for Interobserver reliability during the remainder of the study.

Informed consent was obtained from the parents through the Administrative Staff of the Day Care Center. The investigators held a meeting with the parents and answered their questions about the project.

Data Collection

Phase I. The observers entered the actual setting where the research was being conducted. Fourteen 2 hour observational periods scheduled over seven weeks were done twice per week on alternate days and alternate hours. Examples of alternate days are Monday and Wednesday the first week, Tuesday and Thursday the second week, Wednesday and Friday the third week, and Monday and Wednesday the fourth week. Alternate hours were arranged to include time immediately after arrival in the morning, lunch period, preparation for naptime, and time prior to departure in the afternoon.

Phase II. During the next ten weeks, the teaching program was implemented for one hour each week. As the children learned to identify their feelings and the stimulus that evoked the feelings, the teacher and classroom aide, were taught reflective responses that would reinforce effective communication skills demonstrated by the children. Reinforcement elicits, sustains and increases appropriate behavior (Mussen & Esenberg-Berg 1977).

Table 3 illustrates examples of content and learning activities for the children. Table 4 illustrates the type of reflective responses taught to the teacher and classroom aide.

Insert Table 3

Insert Table 4

Phase III. Upon completion of the Teaching Program, the investigators conducted a review session with the observors. The observers returned to the day care center one week following the ten week teaching period and completed fourteen two hour observation periods over a seven week period. The schedule followed the exact pattern used in Phase 1 prior to instituting the teaching program.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Repeated measures analysis of variance and co-variance with the Geisser and Greenhouse Correction to degrees of freedom were used for analyzing data.

The F ratio obtained revealed a significant difference in the total number of acting out behaviors observed before and after implementation of the teaching program. $F(1,25) = 22.62$, $p < .0001$. Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant difference also in acting out behaviors noted in pre-post observations for each day of the week over a seven week period. $F(4,100) = 6.84$, $p < .0001$.

Interaction of testing period and each day of the week is graphically presented in figure 1.

Insert Figure 1.

The only interaction between days of the week and the frequency of acting out behaviors was noted on Friday. The frequency of undesirable behaviors observed was higher after the teaching sessions were completed. This was attributed to a large number of frequencies observed for four specific behaviors during the first five weeks post teaching. These behaviors were moving from seats without permission, marking on walls, screaming and throwing objects. There was a decrease in the observed frequencies for the four behaviors beginning the sixth week post teaching, with maintainance of the decreased frequencies through the seventh week post teaching. According to Campbell and Cook, (1979), when delayed response to treatment is seen, it is difficult to interpret, if there is no theoretical rationale for how long a delay should occur before an effect is expected. In this instance the changes were attributed to appropriate reflective skills and reinforcement by the teacher and classroom aide.

On the basis of the findings, the researchers concluded that the structured teaching program was effective and that the four year olds in this sample were able to learn communication skills. Findings in this study were supported by the theory of teaching-learning and concept attainment (Bruner (1960,66).

Summary

A sample of 19 preschool children, four years of age, participated in a study designed to determine the effects of teaching communication skills on acting out behaviors in a day care center.

There was a significant difference in the overall frequency of acting out behaviors seen during pre and post observations. Also changes seen in delayed responses for four specific behaviors were attributed to reflective skills used by the teacher and classroom aide. The four year olds in this study did learn effective communication skills when teaching was directed toward their level of understanding and significant others reinforced the learning which occured.

Implications of the Study

Learning to relate to others is one of the developmental task identified for preschool children. Teachers and families play an instrumental role in facilitating and reinforcing achievement of this task. Through anticipatory guidance pre school teachers can assist families with techniques that strengthen the development of effective communication skills. Such techniques my include reflecting, elaborating, responding, and listening. Hymovich and Chamberlan (1981), state that increasing the way families communicate with each other is worthwhile and productive since effective communication enhances problem solving and self esteem.

Recommendations for further study are:

1. Replication with a larger sample of four year olds from a variety of inner city day care centers to increase generalization of findings.

2. Examine the relationships between the variables; role taking, empathy, and teaching communication skills to four and five year olds.

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TABLE 1

Acting Out Behaviors Indentified by the Investigators and Teachers at the Day Care Center

Speaking out in class without being recognized.

Hitting

Grabing something away from another child.

Kicking

Spitting

Biting

Pulling Hair

Scratching

Moving from seats without permission

Swearing

Crying inappropriatily

Yelling

Screaming

Name calling

Deliberate bedwetting

Wetting on floor

Throwing objects across room

Breaking toys

Throwing food across the table during lunchtime and snacktime.

Marking on walls with pencils or crayons

Marking on furniture with pencils or crayons.

Pinching

Breaking furniture

Throwing water

TABLE 2

Observation Form

	Frequencies
moving from seats without permission	
marking on walls with pencils and crayons	
marking on furniture with pencils and crayons	
wetting on floor	
crying inappropriately	
deliberate bedwetting	
screaming	
yelling	
swearing	
throwing food across the table during luch and break time	
breaking furniture	
throwing objects across room	
breaking toys	
grabbing something from another child	
name calling	
throwing water	
snatching	
pushing	
pulling hair	
slapping	
punching	
scratching	
biting	
kicking	
spitting	
hitting	

_____ AGE GROUP
_____ DAY OF WEEK
_____ TIME OF DAY

Table 3 Example of Content and Learning Activities for the Children

Content	Learning Activities
1. Identification of the feeling "glad or happy."	Have children view audio visuals on feelings of " glad." Identify and describe how glad feels and what kind of situations evoke this feeling.

Each identified feeling was presented using this same procedure. The feelings included mad, sad, fear, envy, loved, friendly, and helpful. As the children identified other feelings these were presented using a similar procedure.

Content	Learning Activities
2. Verbalization of feeling and stimulus "I feel...because..."	Role Playing. Situations which will evoke specific feelings will be introduced and role played by the children.

Table 4 Example of Reflective responses for Teacher and Classroom Aide

Content	Learning Experience
Reflective responses "You feel....because...." "You wish....because...."	Have teacher describe situations that evoke various feelings such as glad, sad, fear, loved. Have teacher and aide role play appropriate reflective responses.

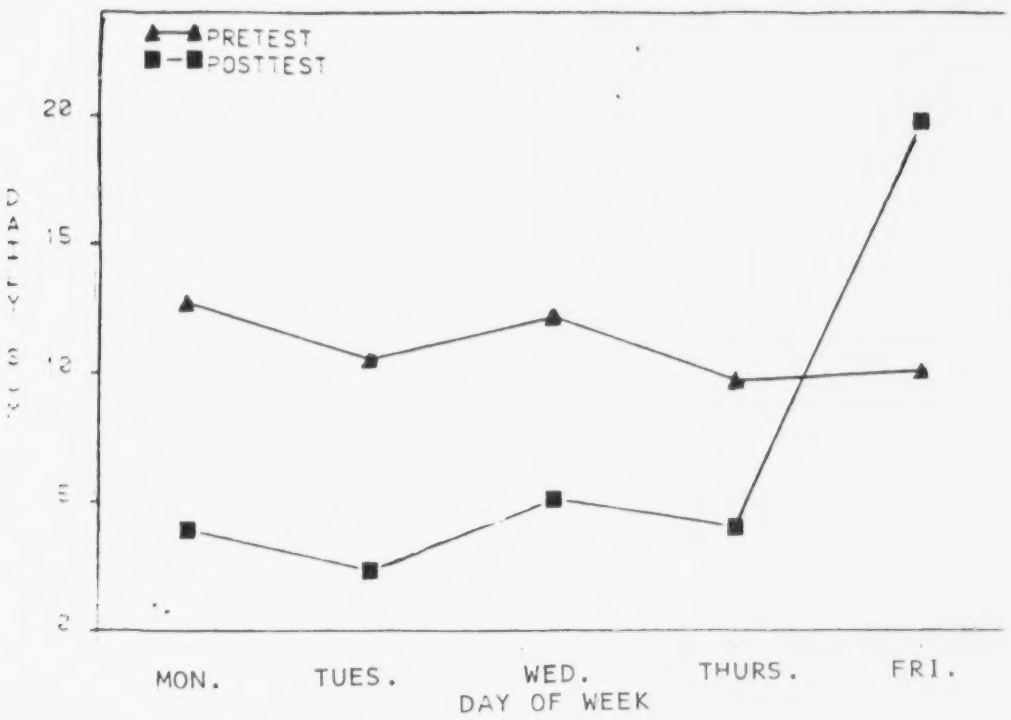

FIGURE 1 INTERACTION OF TESTING PERIOD AND DAY OF WEEK

Figure Captions

Table 1: Acting Out Behaviors Identified by Investigators and Teachers at The Day Care Center, pg 20.

Table 2: Observation Form, pg 21.

Table 3: Example of Content and Learning Activities for Children, pg 22.

Table 4: Example of Reflective Response For Teachers and Classroom Aide, pg 22.

Figure 1: Interaction of Testing Period and Day of Week, pg 23.

Biographical Summary Data for
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"The Family: An Overview," Chapter for Family Nursing Textbook to be published by Appleton-Century-Crofts Publishing Company, Spring, 1987.

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HONORS AND AWARDS

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